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SIPDIS

FOR EUR/NB MIGUEL RODRIGUES

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [RU](#) [GG](#) [EN](#)  
SUBJECT: ESTONIAN PRESIDENT ILVES EMPHASIZES NATO  
COLLECTIVE DEFENSE

Classified by: Ambassador S. Davis Phillips for reasons 1.4  
(b) & (d)

11. (C) On September 2, Ambassador called on President Toomas Hendrik Ilves to discuss the situation in Georgia. Ambassador was accompanied by DCM and Pol/Econ Chief (notetaker). Sven Jurgenson, Ilves' Foreign Policy Advisor (and a former Ambassador to the United States) and Jana Vanaveski, Head of the Foreign Policy Department also participated in the meeting. Ilves opened the discussion by asserting that NATO needs to get back to its core issues. Russia's invasion "changes everything" he noted. This requires us to think seriously about what NATO's main mission is. We were caught up on the "peace dividend," but now we have to start investing again in collective security. The Ambassador asked Ilves his views on the possibility of NATO bases in Estonia - a topic which has been debated widely in the Estonian press. Ilves cited a few areas where NATO support would be useful (pre-positioning equipment, development of Estonia's Amari airbase, investing in strategic infrastructure, putting ships into Paldiski Port near Tallinn). However, he said, the real issue is not basing. What NATO needs is a coherent strategy to deal with a "belligerent, aggressive" Russia.

12. (C) Ilves contended that the conflict with Russia now is fundamentally different than it was during the cold war. Countries in Western Europe no longer feel the immediate threat at their doorstep so they downplay the situation. However, Georgia proved East Europeans fears about Russia were not irrational. Now they want Europe to take a tougher position, but they also want a U.S. presence. Jurgenson emphasized this point, saying there are "things which we cannot discuss effectively at NATO." Also, the split within the EU means the best Europe can come up with is what was decided September 1 in Brussels. We are at the very early stages of a "new cold war" and the underlying center of gravity can only be the United States, Jurgenson added.

13. (C) Ilves also noted that the struggle with Russia is no longer an ideological one. In practical terms, this means siding with Russia doesn't raise questions about one's loyalty. Pointing to former German Chancellor Schroeder and former Finnish PM Lipponen's involvement with the Nordstream Pipeline, Ilves asserted that officials are clearly being "bought" by the Russians. It has also been clear - since President Putin's speech at Munich - that Russia is trying to position itself as a counterweight to the United States, Ilves said. But who is going to align themselves with Russia? Only "pariahs, sleazebags, or rogue states" like Chavez, Castro and Lukashenko will recognize South Ossetia.

14. (C) Ilves called NATO's decision not to offer MAP to Georgia and Ukraine at the Bucharest Summit a key problem.

This decision was misread (or read correctly) by Russia and it "emboldened them." Now, if Russia senses ambiguity (words but no consequences), it will go even further than it already has. While MAP is still an important step, NATO needs to focus on its primary mission - collective defense of its allies. Ilves also noted, with interest, an August 26 Washington Post article which advocated using the terrorist finance legal framework against the Russians. Money and travel privileges are consequences the Russians will understand, Jurgenson added. Suspension of Russian membership in the Council of Europe (for invading a sovereign country), suspending the EU-Russia visa facilitation agreement (for Russian noncompliance with its provisions) and supporting economic and political development in Ukraine and Georgia could also be important measures.

15. (C) Comment: Ilves has taken a headline role in beating the drum on Georgia for Estonia. However, he is clearly frustrated by his own lack of real executive authority and by Europe's lack of unity. Ilves did not offer specific proposals on next steps. Instead, he emphasized NATO's need to focus on collective security and speculated it will take "many months and years" for the west to figure out how to handle the new situation with Russia. End comment.

Phillips